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# **POLAND'S STRUGGLE AND THE WORLD'S PEACE**

**BY SIGISMOND STOJOWSKI**

THE re-establishment of the Polish Republic has been not only a long deferred act of historical justice, but also a measure of political necessity in evidence of President Wilson's true and noble words that "the right thing is the expedient thing." Obviously Russia must remain screened off from Germany, if she is to work out her salvation. The Germans themselves, confident in the world's continued blindness, are unafraid of confessing that a strong and powerful Poland would be the sole obstacle to Germany's possible revenge and future world-dominion. Yet, France alone seems fully to realize the fact, because—it may be—hit the hardest, she learned the dire lesson best. The great old man of France wrote to the Polish Ambassador in Paris: "France, adhering to her traditions and in accord with her Allies, will do her utmost to revive Poland according to her national aspirations and within her historical borders."

Unfortunately, this accord is sadly lacking. Complacent ignorance and political gambling have found their way, as they did before, to the green table of diplomatists and into channels of public information so as to endanger great and salutary achievements. Tender mercies have been extended to the beaten foe; severities, accusations, even injustice are reserved to friends. The make-shift of a free city of Danzig which had been tried in the early nineteenth century and did not work, except for Prussian intrigue, is being applied again. Shorn of her rights along the sea, Poland is yet uncertain of victory in the Western borderlands where "the foe of humanity" has been allowed a free hand for poisonous propaganda and violence unabashed. Yet, Ludendorff himself repeatedly emphasizes in his book that the possession of the mining districts of Upper Silesia was the basic and indispensable condition of a successful Prussian war on a

double front. It is almost universally ignored that the output in coal of this one stolen province is equivalent to that of the entirety of France. When the Polish Deputies of Silesia took their stand upon Germany's acceptance of President Wilson's fourteen points, including the reunion of Polish lands torn asunder, in the midst of the uproar created in the Assembly, President Fehrenbach hurled at them the reproach: "You want to kill the Prussian industry." The Polish Deputy Korfanty retorted: "The Prussian industry is war." A worldwide gallery is now anxiously watching Germany rent by civil strife, but over there a remarkable unity of front is presented, including all wings of extreme opinion, when it comes to the retention of the rich province of Upper Silesia. All stratagems of force and fraud have been employed in order to frustrate Poland in the plebiscite which a faint-hearted desire to placate Germany has conceded in regions that should have remained undisputed. That the Polish population reaches almost 90 per cent in these regions is of no consequence to German Junkers and Socialists alike. Nor does it seem to be, alas! to the misguided advocates of German recuperation in the Allied camp. About these mining districts which have proved such a deadly weapon in Prussia's "hand of violence," a British economist, Mr. Keynes, is moved to say that "Poland does not need them." On such sorry premises, and without alarm, this strange prophet ventures to threaten that Poland may tumble "into the arms of anyone who comes along." The world would have to pay a heavy penalty if concern for German prosperity really could command such a sacrifice.

While still in the pangs of birth, the new Poland is called upon to fight again—as old Poland did for centuries—the godly fight of Western civilization and freedom against Eastern barbarians. Underfed and underclad, the Polish army yet remains undaunted. So a new call for peace, resounds, luring the world, perhaps, into some new trap? Solidarity of danger implying solidarity of purpose might prompt the fear lest the negotiations remain "fruitless because faithless." Instead, the hallucinations of our horror-stricken friends conjure up a fabulous monster in our own ranks: the bug-bear of Polish Imperialism! In the name—supposedly—of that same ethnographical principle so imprudently discarded along Poland's Western frontier, great

ado is being raised that Poland might trespass beyond the Eastern border provisionally assigned to her. In high quarters—apparently—the oracle has spoken that “Russia must not be dismembered.” At a distance of several thousand miles of land and sea, the slogan may perfectly fit prudent diplomatic policy along the old line of “wait and see.” In the midst of the turmoil Poland can hardly wait and cannot fail to see. Having been dismembered herself, she would not care to take part in any dismemberment. But what power on earth can hold back the clock of history and prevent from falling apart that which is rotten in its foundations?

Why should Poland—exhausted, famished, poverty-stricken—fight the Bolsheviki? Some people think she is drawing chestnuts out of the fire for the sake of others. Everybody knows that all her energies are sorely needed for the gigantic task of reconstruction after five years of war and over a century of slavery. But already Mr. Paderewski, the former Premier, averred that “one cannot fight Bolshevism with the Bible alone.” While the guns are thundering behind the peace proposals of the Soviets, naïve souls over here keep asking whether the Poles had not better retire behind their own borders. Putting aside the military side of the problem, how could the Poles forsake those peoples in whose breasts the craving for liberty has begun to stir and even those of their own stock who would keep a Polish heart in spite of a century of oppression? Has not Poland ever been a protector of small nations? Has not Polish blood flowed everywhere whenever liberty was at stake? Can the new Poland turn a deaf ear to the legitimate aspirations of its own “Irredenta”, and would it be wise for the world to leave it an open sore?

The Peace conditions of the Polish Government merely aim to apply the main principle of the new order of things: “Government by the consent of the governed.” That Poland means to appropriate any part of Russia is sheer slander. But the return, pure and simple, of formerly Polish borderlands to Russia, advocated by misinformed or prejudiced advocates of Russia’s right of conquest, would be the grossest violation of the very principles in the name of which the mightiest of all wars has been waged and won. Russia’s share in Poland’s partition can scarcely be held as sacred property.

In 1656, it is true, after the Czar's armies had invaded Lithuania, the Russian deputies offered this argument to the Polish King: "The war must have been right when God gave Lithuania into the Czar's hands and the Czar must not return what God gave him to anybody." Whatever the merit of such a plea, it is high time that the old lie covered by the now obsolete title of "Czar of all the Russias," be, at last, exploded. Geographical misnomers such as "White Russia," "Red Russia," etc., accredited in the Western world for political reasons are largely responsible for confusion of thought mischievously exploited in interested quarters. Between Poland and Russia proper, lay the vast complex of Lithuanian and Ruthenian lands. For physical reasons, Ruthenia failed to develop a large political organization of its own. Split up into many principalities, she could not achieve unity of national development. Many a modern problem has sprung from that very source.

The Grand Dukes, later Czars of Muscovy—"celebrated cut-throats," a French historian calls them,—found themselves in direct competition with the Grand Dukes of Lithuania for the control of Ruthenian lands. When the Teutonic Knights of the Cross—a hornet's nest on the Baltic Coast—threatened her from the other side, Lithuania, taken between two fires, found in neighborly and unaggressive Poland a salvation-plank. A fraternal union, unique in history, was thus concluded, the spirit of which is expressed in the beautiful words of the preamble to the Act of Horodlo (1413): "Nor can that endure which is not founded upon love." It endured for several centuries, and to the spirit of justice and tolerance which cemented it is due the remarkable fact that Poland's peaceful work as pioneer of democracy, though brutally interrupted by the act of spoliation of three coalescing autocracies, has left traces so deep that not even a century and a half of persecution could stamp them out.

Poland's partition bequeathed to the partitioning Powers problems which the right of might utterly failed to solve. The entire Eastern section of the old Republic, historical Lithuania, an area of over 300,000 square kilometers, had never been and has never become a Russian country. Until 1831 its character was mainly Polish. Lithuania took part in Poland's uprisings against Russia as she had in all of Poland's glories and agonies. Ever

since, the process of Russification assumed the shape of an orgy. Even so—odd as it seems—as late as the 'eighties of last century the White-Ruthenian peasantry thought that the Russian tax-collectors were collecting money for the Polish King. Oppressive Russian rule fostered ignorance on the ground that "better no progress at all than a Polish progress." It thus succeeded in turning conquered lands into what one traveller described as "half a pig-stye and half a hard-labor prison."

During the World War a few weeks sufficed, after the withdrawal of Russian police and bureaucracy, to erase completely the Russian stamp and unexpectedly reveal a Polish survival. The advancing German armies had to dismiss their Russian interpreters and use some Polish ones instead. The old Russian fake-census of 1897 had altogether eliminated Poles where it was ordered there should be none. So, the new census taken by the German armies of occupation in 1916 proved an utter surprise, unpleasant to Germany and Russia alike. The percentages of Polish populations ran into high figures and those Polish minorities that were to be sacrificed, in many places turned into majorities. Important as the "cultural" and "historical" Polish claims are in these regions, they also are supported by present-day statistics.

Besides Poles, however, there are others to be consulted and satisfied. New nationalisms have sprung up and must be taken into account. These occasionally show, it is true, an ominously anti-Polish attitude which their zealots abroad never tire of exaggerating. The raking up of the social question as an anti-Polish weapon and mischievous foreign interference are responsible for that. The Polish-Ruthenian feud in Eastern Galicia was a favorite political game of the Austrian Government. A German-made Lithuania was so designed as to embitter Polish-Lithuanian relations. Great store was laid by Germany and Austria upon an anti-Polish Ukraine as a golden bridge into the heart of the Eastern world. It will be remembered that in the infamous treaty of Brest-Litovsk Germany handed over a large slice of Poland to Ukraine, while, in a secret clause, Russia abandoned the fate of Poland to Germany. Poland never could sink to the moral level of such peacemakers.

In place of and in contrast to the German scheme of the "Balkanization" of Eastern Europe by splitting it up

into hostile communities, the example and tradition of the old Polish Republic offers a rational and possible solution. The principle of a federation of "the free with the free and the equal with the equal"—the old Jagellonian idea which once radiated far and wide, attracting kindred peoples into the orbit of liberal and peaceful Poland—does not appear unworthy of the modern world. The dream may be premature, but certainly is not ungenerous, if some United States of Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Ruthenia, is thrust as a large belt from the Baltic to the Black Sea, across the German path to the heart of Russia, to the coveted treasures of Asia and to the Pacific Coast.

For the sake of a happy future, the lessons of the past are well worth meditating upon. At the crossways of the European East and West, Poland alone succeeded in reconciling two different worlds and principles. Religion and culture radiating from the two main hearths of Rome and Byzance met right there and drew lines of cleavage which have persisted. So, a leaning towards Catholicism still implies a leaning towards Poland. Yet, Catholic Poland ignored persecution of religion, language and nationality which Russia practised down to the present day. Under changed conditions old perils also have persisted. "Safety first" seems to be calling again for an association of forces among peoples rising to the sun of liberty, lest they be ground to dust between the upper and nether millstones of ever aggressive Teutonism and Bolshevist barbarity. Old Poland grew into a mighty commonwealth without ever waging a war of conquest. The new Poland, faithful to ancient traditions and ideals, means to leave everybody free to choose his destiny. In reply to the patriotic exaltation of a prelate who welcomed the Polish Chief of State in a city of the borderlands, General Pilsudski solemnly declared: "Poland can have in the borderlands but one policy, that of honesty." So plebiscites will be taken of which Poland accepts the issue. In strict accordance with President Wilson's proclaimed creed, everybody's case is to be "judged upon its own merits." But the case of Russia, that is the "status quo ante" based upon Russia's right of spoliation and conquest, although it still is haunting the minds of diplomatists and political writers who lag behind the necessities of the day, seems in a sorry plight by the crude light of facts and numbers. Among the twelve

million inhabitants of the Eastern section of the old Polish Republic, appropriated by Russia in 1772, there are scarcely 100,000 Russians!

Fortunately, Poland is yet a living force. In the new Polish army—numbering about one million men—the spirit of valor and chivalry which spurred Sobieski to noble deeds, seems revived. The mere fact of its raising an organization in a ravaged, downtrodden country is an achievement nothing short of amazing. Way up to the Baltic Coast that army has already brought victory to the Lettish people whom Germanic encroachments kept down and pushed aside. It is now on the way towards the Black Sea, across those wonderfully fertile Ukrainian lands, the bloodiest battlefield of all Christianity, soaked for centuries with Polish blood. Will the modern world realize better what Poland's sword and shield mean for its protection than old Europe did whose selfish blindness allowed the "Knight among Nations" to be slain after centuries of service?

The recent Polish-Ukrainian accord is a blow at those dreams of world-dominion that have so far miscarried but may yet be cherished. It may also prove a corner-stone in the reconstruction of disrupted Eastern Europe. This difficult but unavoidable reconstruction is the pivotal issue upon which the welfare of East and West alike depend. Poland alone, by the weight of her numbers as well as by the virtue of her spirit, represents the constructive force that can be trusted and should be helped in this momentous task. In order to achieve it, Poland must fully come into her own, whether her possessions be hidden away from the narrow vision of a distracted world in the East or in the West, contested by false friends or revengeful enemies. She must be restored to the control of all her resources in natural wealth and man-power, firmly established upon the unshakeable rock of territorial integrity and ethnic unity. It is incumbent upon the good will and understanding of the world to use it to its own advantage by helping Poland to strength and victory in a hard struggle, in which she could once more inscribe upon her banners—as did the Polish revolutionaries of 1831:— "For our liberty and yours."

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